



& Workers' Liberty

# Solidarity

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## McStrike proves we can fight back

On Monday 4 September workers at McDonald's stores in Cambridge and Crayford made trade union history by becoming the first UK McDonald's workers to strike. Welcomed by a large number of supporters, around 40 workers from the two stores walked out early on Monday morning before picketing their stores. Workers' Liberty activists joined the 100 strong picket line in Crayford along with supporters from across the labour movement.

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As Parliament restarts MPs clash over the EU withdrawal bill.

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**"The horizons of socialism"**



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Vote Leonard!**

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# North Korea plays a deadly game

By Micheal Elms

**The criminal game of brinkmanship being played between the rulers of the big capitalist powers and the Stalinist monarchy of North Korea continues to menace millions of innocent people with the threat of nuclear war.**

On 28 August, North Korea's rulers fired a missile over Japan; a week later, they tested what they said was a hydrogen bomb, proving that they are now well on the way to developing a nuclear arsenal capable of hitting the mainland United States.

The increased tensions are a result of two destabilising factors: a string of technical successes for North Korea's engineers (or possibly lucky purchases of foreign kit); and the Trump administration's strategy of disruptive, aggressive diplomacy.

Trump's blustering sabre-rattling, his talk of bringing "fire and fury" to North Korea, is widely regarded as a piece of theatre for domestic consumption; an American version of the ludicrously overblown North Korean state rhetoric on the conflict.

Boris Johnson and Steve Bannon have both summed up the conven-



tional view of Western bourgeois leaders commenting respectively that "the military options are not good" and that there is "no military solution... Forget it". After all, any war with North Korea would likely entail the immediate destruction of Seoul in South Korea by North Korean artillery.

This view is also that taken by a senior Asia researcher for the big Dutch bank ING, who this week told the *Telegraph*: "Unless this is the precursor to US military action, which we doubt, then in a little over a day or two, tensions will calm again, making this a good buying opportunity for investors

with a strong enough nerve."

At the 4 September meeting of the UN Security Council, Japan, France and Britain have all pressed for a more conventional way of punishing North Korea and allowing the US to save face, short of war: harsh economic sanctions (to which China and Russia are unlikely to agree).

But there are voices close to the Trump administration who are more in favour of war with North

Korea than previous American administrations. In a recent television interview, Senator Lindsey Graham summed up that view: "If there's going to be a war to stop [Kim Jong Un], it will be over there. If thousands die, they're going to die over there. They're not going to die here. And [Trump's] told me that to my face".

This sentiment has been repeated by senior advisors to Trump. In April 2017 National Security Advisor H R McMaster responded to a question from *Fox News* about whether the administration would be willing to risk "humanitarian catastrophe" on the Korean peninsula, by saying "What the president has first and foremost on his mind is to protect the American people. And I don't think anyone thinks that it would be acceptable to have this kind of regime with nuclear weapons that can target, that can range the United States."

Joseph Dunford, Trump's chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has made similar remarks.

Whether Trump wants war or not, the ratcheting up of tensions

and the choreographed provocations of repeated military drills, live-fire exercises and missile launches could easily lead to an accidental incident that triggers war.

None of the players in this conflict are friends of the freedom of Korean workers.

China and Russia prefer to keep North Korea in place as a bulwark against American power in the Pacific.

China and South Korea fear the fall of the North Korean regime as the bringer of expensive unification and mass migration.

America's conventional policy of containment aims not to remove the North Korean regime but to reduce its efficacy as a threat to the US-led Pacific power bloc: Trump threatens to change that policy to one of mass slaughter of North Koreans.

**International solidarity with North Korean workers against the Kim regime, and against the blood-curdling game of nuclear poker that the great powers are playing with their lives, is the best way for socialists to help.**

## Libya: imperial rivalry and corruption

By Hugh Edwards

**At the end of July, when France and Italy were about to sign a deal sealing the grip of Italy's largest and most profitable company, Fincantieri, on France's massive shipbuilding industry, Macron upset the applecart by announcing the suspension of the business agreement.**

Macron claimed it was to protect French jobs: but it was clearly a move to reassert French control over one of the country's most strategically important companies.

The Italian media, having first hailed Macron's presidency as the promise of "the exemplary Statism and Europeanism" so lacking in their own bourgeoisie, immediately denounced him as a miserable Trump-like protectionist and "Sovereignist", who needed to be taught a lesson by the Italian government. The pathetic so called "communists" of *Il Manifesto* called for a defence of "national dignity too long humiliated".

The important point here (apart from noting that a year before Fincantieri had more than ably protected "national dignity" by literally stealing from the French a contract for building the world's largest fleet in Qatar) is that Macron's abrupt violation of diplomatic and formal norms of business etiquette "at home" was quickly followed by something similar "abroad", again at the expense of the Italians.

Just when the Italian premier was about to host a convention on the immigration crisis in the Mediterranean, Macron seized the

headlines and the initiative with the announcement of a successful accord between the president of Libya's Government of National Agreement, Al Farrag, and General Hafta. Hafta's forces control around three-quarters of the country, consigning the Italian-, UN-, British- and USA-backed Al Farrag regime to Tripoli and its environs.

The accord acknowledged the French-led initiative and promised concrete steps between the divided forces to bring about national and regional unity with the support of "the international community", including the Egyptians, Russians and Chinese who had participated in the Macron exercise. And all of this without a whisper of information to the Italians.

### REFUGEES BETRAYED

**Macron added insult to injury when, in his opening address to his partners, he praised the Italians for their "unequalled record of humanitarian work in the Mediterranean", while his country turns an even-more-deaf ear to Italian pleas to open its borders to asylum-seekers.**

It was against this background that Gentiloni and Interior Minister Minniti sought to recuperate Italy's international image and clout when in a panicky pact with Al Serrag they announced the beefing up of Italy's presence in Libya with ships, soldiers, and money, while effectively annulling the NGO operations in the Mediterranean.

These actions will consign the refugees to the camps of Al Serrag, the Islamic fundamentalists, or Hafta, while mouthing platitudes

for public consumption about "helping the refugees in their own homes".

Thus Hafta the former Gaddafi military leader positions himself more and more as the pivotal player to the stabilisation of the country. Hafta's project of pacifying and uniting the country — or at least the 40 or so most powerful tribes — is necessary to any reconstruction.

Hafta has set himself up as the standard-bearer of imperial interests in the jockeying for the prize, and he has brokered a deal with France to link Libya via a canal to Mali, Niger and Chad.

Italy may be tempted by his proposals on the migrant and refugee problem. He has condemned "the useless exercise to block the arrival of the refugees on the coast, simply creating an ever-mounting burden and crisis for Libyans, and a growing threat to the country's sovereignty".

His solution gets to his murderous point "Give me 20 billion dollars — I will build a military system to filter and block everything and everyone along the 4000 km border of the Libyan desert. I possess the soldiers, I can marshall the workers — I lack machines, I lack training courses for frontier guards, arms and munitions — 20 billion dollars from Europe and you will have no more problems."

**The nightmare and bottomless horrors faced by Africa's migrants deepens by the day, and now the fruits of imperial and domestic reaction have summoned the spectre of a former Gaddafi butcher with a recipe for totalitarian mass murder.**

## Trump boosts troops in Afghanistan

By Omar Raii

**Those who wished to see an end to the United States' longest ever military venture, its sixteen year-long war in Afghanistan, were left disappointed when in late August, Donald Trump committed to send more US troops in the country.**

Trump has promised a further 4,000 troops and to scrap timetables for withdrawal. He has gone further than previous US presidents in explicitly calling out Pakistan for its "failures" in dealing with jihadists operating from Pakistani territory.

The move marks a clear shift for Donald Trump, a man already not known for predictability and consistency.

Prior to his election Trump was notorious for constantly tweeting negatively about Barack Obama's lack of success in the war in Afghanistan, repeatedly denouncing the venture as a "waste of trillions of dollars", saying that the US should "get out immediately" and complaining that the US should be "rebuilt first".

Donald Trump's sudden conversion can be attributed to his Defence Secretary Mattis and National Security Adviser McMaster, both former generals who come from a US military establishment that sees Obama's policy in Afghanistan as having been not just a failure but something that

must be remedied by strength not withdrawal.

The Afghan government was officially pleased with the US shift.

Trump's words have highlighted what many have known for years, that the war in Afghanistan is not so much about rebuilding a country or helping the Afghan people as having geostrategic control over a territory that has long been used as a safe haven for jihadist organisations. In terms of that explicit objective, the US has clearly been failing in Afghanistan over the past few years.

But the belief that increased American troop presence will achieve anything substantial is naïve. In any case the main reasoning behind this latest initiative is effectively a short-term one. With the Taliban controlling large swathes of the country and ISIS/Daesh being a significant presence in Afghanistan, the US are hoping to crush the jihadist forces, as long as their co-thinkers ramp up attacks in the west.

The US war in Afghanistan cannot build a better future for the Afghan people — that is not what it's about. The short-term goal of defeating certain jihadists is what's most important and everything else is secondary.

**And for a capricious narcissist like Trump, just about everything is secondary to posturing and looking tough.**



## McDonalds workers lead fightback on low pay

By Gemma Short

On Monday 4 September workers at McDonald's stores in Cambridge and Crayford made trade union history by becoming the first UK McDonald's workers to strike.

Welcomed out by a large number of supporters, around 40 workers from the two stores walked out early on Monday morning before picketing their stores.

Workers' Liberty activists joined the 100 strong picket line in Crayford along with supporters from across the labour movement.

Workers are fighting for a £10 an hour minimum wage for all — ending the use of youth rates and raising pay significantly for all workers; an end to zero-hours contracts; and for union recognition.

McDonald's workers are also motivated by bullying and harassment in the workplace. Steve, a worker at the Cambridge store, told the *Labour Days* podcast that there is a culture of sexual harassment in the workplace:

"In Crayford, a young woman gets daily harassment from the same group of kids. She'd brought it to the management's attention, they just don't care. One day she'd had enough of it, she spoke up against these kids, spoke back to them. The management dragged her into the office, shouted at her and forced her to sign a resignation letter."

Shen, a worker from the Crayford store told *Solidarity*, "when you have bullying and harassment in the workplace, they use [zero-hours contracts] against you when you stand up for yourself. They cut your shifts, as I have had done to me, and it's time for it to stop."

After picket lines workers from Cambridge and Crayford met outside Parliament for a rally with hundreds of supporters. Labour

MPs John McDonnell, Laura Pidcock, Emma Dent Coad and John Spellar joined the rally.

Workers at McDonald's stores are some of the lowest paid workers due to McDonald's continued use of differing rates of pay for different age groups. The government's so-called "National Living Wage" of £7.20 an hour is only compulsory for workers over 25. Between 21-24 the compulsory minimum wage is £7.05, aged 18-20 it is £5.60. If you are under 18 bosses can get away with you as little as £4.05 an hour.

The McDonald's workers union, the Bakers', Food and Allied Workers' Union, has highlighted the case of Tyrone, 17, a worker at Cambridge McDonald's who is paid just £4.75 an hour.

Tyrone's situation, documented by Aditya Chakrabortty in the *Guardian* and on the Labour Days podcast, of sofa-surfing and living in a broken down car, is not unique. Nor is it unique to workers at McDonald's. Low pay is a reality for a growing number of workers.

In October 2016 (2017's report has not yet been published) the Resolution Foundation found that 1.5 million workers (that is one-in-twenty workers) were on the minimum wage, but that 5.7 million (or one-in-five workers) were on "low pay" — pay that was below two-thirds of the median pay.

That report based its analysis on wages in mid-2015. At the time the Foundation estimated that the introduction of the National Living Wage would increase pay for around 2.6 million workers. But today's National Living Wage is still below the Resolution Foundation's measure of low pay. The Living Wage Foundation calculates a real Living Wage should now be £8.45, and £9.75 in London.

McDonald's workers are fighting back, and they are not alone. Workers at Picturehouse cinemas have been striking for almost a year for

a Living Wage, sick pay, maternity/paternity pay, and union recognition.

The summer has seen a flurry of strikes over pay, in a variety of sectors. In some cases already organised workers, who have faced years of pay restraint, are starting to kick back. Strikes (or threats of strikes) at ROM steel workers in Sheffield, of controllers and other support workers on London buses, at crane company HTC, of refuse workers in Doncaster, at Sellafield Nuclear plant, and at Fawley oil refinery have all been over pay.

But previously unorganised or workers, often on the lowest pay, are also fighting back. Workers at the Bank of England struck in August, as did Serco-employed cleaners, caterers and porters at Bart's NHS Trust hospitals.

Mixed-fleet workers at British Airways have led a successful strike campaign against poverty pay for their cabin crew, and are now fighting for their pay rise not to be implemented at the cost of the company victimising the union activists that fought for it.

Campaigns and strikes for justice for cleaners on university campuses have led to SOAS and the LSE taking their cleaners and porters back in house, and at the LSE on the same terms and conditions as in-house workers.

At the McDonald's strike rally one Cambridge worker summed up how they are feeling on their first strike day — "it is the best thing I have ever done".

- [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/sep/01/poverty-ill-health-fast-food-workers-striking-mcdonalds-shareholders](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/sep/01/poverty-ill-health-fast-food-workers-striking-mcdonalds-shareholders)
- <https://soundcloud.com/labour-days/labour-days-ep6-the-2017-mcstrike-and-the-2012-new-york-waiters-strike>
- Watch our videos of the strike day on Facebook.

## Mental health cause of most absence from work

By Simon Nelson

Analysis of over 12 million fit notes, the New Labour replacement for sick notes, has just been published.

The results (relating to notes issued in 2016) are unsurprising but troubling. There was a 14% rise in notes relating to stress and anxiety and 31% were issued for mental health problems; these notes now account for the biggest proportion, overtaking numbers of notes issued for bad backs and other musculoskeletal conditions,

Fit notes were intended to provide employers with information on what workers *can* do. At the time the Labour government was less interested in tackling bad working practices or assessing work-related ill health, and more interested in appeasing nonsense about "sick note culture" put about by bosses and the tabloid press.

The fit note designed by the DWP was meant to help workers get better access to treatment and find ways to deal with health issues alongside your employer. But the recent analysis shows that just one in 20 of the notes resulted in accommodations being made by the employer. Most people are still being signed off work completely.

The report also showed that more than five million people were signed off work in the last year. There has been a renewed push for employers to do more to help com-

bat mental health problems like depression and stress, but all of this fails to understand that the cause is as likely to be pressure from the boss! The same boss you are supposed to work with to help you..

Many mental health conditions are difficult to overcome, for a variety of reasons. Over 20% of those signed off are away from work for over three months. Just 3% of people signed off for respiratory problems stay away for three months or more.

Poverty, class and inequality are also a factor in the numbers of notes issued. Knowsley, in Merseyside, had the highest number of notes in proportion to its working-age population, while Richmond in south west London had the lowest.

The bosses' organisation, the Confederation of British Industry said: "The health and well-being of employees is a key priority for employers. Businesses have a duty of care to their employees that considers mental and physical health as well as safety. Most firms will usually have policies in place — especially if they are large businesses — to help support their staff."

But the best policies in any workplace will come out of strong organisation by the labour movement.

**Collective action against poor conditions and a serious approach to mental health are the only things that can reduce the amount of workplace stress and anxiety.**

## Demand justice for jailed Iranian trade unionist

Reza Shahabi, a member of the Executive Committee of the Trade Union of the Tehran and Suburbs Vahed Bus Company, was ordered to return to prison on 8 August. According to a report by his trade union he has been on hunger strike since that date.

He is protesting about the legality of his case and prison conditions. Now Reza Shahabi's health is deteriorating.

The Trade Union of the Tehran and Suburbs Vahed Bus Company has said that the Tehran Prosecutor's Office acted against the law in not considering Reza's medical leave as part of serving his sentence. As a result this labour activist was sentenced to a further year in prison. In addition, while serving his prison term, the court sentenced Shahabi to a further year's imprisonment to follow immediately after the previous conviction and Shahabi must be held in prison for another year and five months, until 8 January 2019.

Reza Shahabi is part of a large number of political prisoners in Rejai Shahr jail who are on hunger



strike as a protest against conditions inside this notorious jail.

Already many labour organisations have supported Reza Shahabi and demanded his release. These include five French trade unions and confederations: Confédération générale du travail (CGT), Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDT), Union Nationale des Syndicats Autonomes (UNSA), Solidaires Unitaires Démocratiques (SUD) and Fédération Syndicale Unitaire (FSU).

**The International Federation of Transport Workers (ITF) has also demanded that Reza Shahabi and Ebrahim Madadi, a fellow Vahed activist, be released.**

• How to support the campaign: <https://shahrokhzamani.com/>

# Scottish Labour: vote Leonard and rebuild the party

## SCOTLAND

By Dale Street

**For the third time in as many years there is to be a leadership contest in the Scottish Labour Party (SLP).**

In October 2014 Johann Lamont was ousted in a coup for which the groundwork had been laid by the right wing several months earlier. Super-Blairite Jim Murphy subsequently defeated Neil Findlay for the post of SLP leader.

Murphy, claimed the right wing, was the "big hitter" the SLP needed to revive its fortunes. When Murphy was elected, the SLP had 41 Westminster MPs. Six months later it had just one.

Even so, Murphy refused to resign — and the Scottish Executive Committee (SEC) passed a vote of confidence in him. But then Murphy decided to resign anyway, claiming that he did not have the support needed to complete his project to "transform" the SLP.

In the subsequent leadership contest of summer 2015 Murphy's deputy, Kezia Dugdale, defeated Ken Macintosh by 78% to 22%. Macintosh was seen as Murphy's candidate, whereas Dugdale, having been deputy

leader, was seen as the natural successor to Murphy.

In the following year's Holyrood elections the SLP vote fell by 8%, it lost 13 seats, and it ended up in third place behind the Tories.

In this year's general election the vagaries of the first-past-the-post system saw the number of SLP MPs increase from one to seven. But the overall SLP vote increased by less than 10,000. In terms of the popular vote and the number of seats won, the SLP finished third behind the Tories.

It would be wrong to pin the blame for the SLP's absolute or relative poor performances in 2016 and 2017 on Dugdale.

The combined legacy of Blairism, cronyism, collaboration with the Tories in Better Together, and the poisonous politics of the Murphy-McTernan duo had reduced the SLP to a toxic brand in the eyes of many voters. But Dugdale's politics fell short of what was needed to revive the SLP's fortunes.

In the 2015 national Labour Party leadership contest Dugdale was officially "neutral" but was publicly critical of Corbyn. In the 2016 contest she openly campaigned against Corbyn and backed Owen Smith. Corbyn's subsequent victory, she claimed, made Labour "unelectable".

Dugdale was seen, and rightly so, as weak

in challenging Sturgeon in Holyrood and half-hearted in her opposition to Scottish independence. And her campaign strategy in this year's general was simply wrong.

The campaign had a target of winning just two new seats. One of them was East Renfrewshire, where Blair McDougall — former Better Together Campaign Director, and former adviser to Jim Murphy — was standing. Unsurprisingly, he performed the worst of all the SLP candidates.

Dugdale seemed not to understand that the record and politics of people like McDougall was what had repelled voters from Labour, just as she failed to understand that Corbyn was winning voters back to Labour.

Dugdale did not share a platform with Corbyn on the two occasions he spoke in Scotland in the election campaign. And the emphasis on "local champions" in SLP election literature was a way of saying:

"When you are deciding how to vote, don't think about the chance you have to elect a Corbyn-led Labour government. Think about how much your Labour candidate can be counted on to take up local issues."

Dugdale was never of the left. But she was not a hardened right-winger either. She became SLP leader almost by default and made a succession of political misjudgements —

the resources squandered on Blair McDougall, for example, could have won the SLP at least another three seats.

The left candidate in the latest leadership contest is list MSP Richard Leonard. The right-wing candidate, masquerading as the "unity" candidate, is list MSP Anas Sarwar, the former SLP deputy leader at the time of Johann Lamont's leadership. It is likely to prove a close contest.

The left in the SLP is much weaker than the Labour left in England and Wales. In the 2016 national leadership contest a majority, albeit not a substantial one, of SLP members backed Owen Smith. The majority of Scottish CLPs are probably still controlled by the right.

Sarwar can draw on much larger resources than Leonard. The right-wing vote will go to Sarwar as a monolithic bloc. And Sarwar's attempts to portray himself as pro-Corbyn, coupled with the readiness of Pauline McNeill MSP to act as his campaign chair, may allow him to pull in votes from the left.

**The SLP left needs to ruthlessly expose the charlatanism of Sarwar's election campaign, alongside of mounting a campaign which persuades SLP members not just to cast a vote for Leonard but also to organise to win over their CLPs for left-wing politics.**

## Deal with the serious feminist concerns

### LETTER

I thought Claudia Raven's attempt to navigate the recent discussion around trans rights and women's rights was far too unquestioning of the dominant left narrative on the issues.

A recurrent feature of that narrative is to minimise or dismiss the concerns raised by some feminists as exaggerations, shallow or, worse still, transphobic.

I agree that we should be for the freedom to break out of gender roles, including the championing of the rights of transgender people, transsexuals, and transvestites, opposition to discrimination on grounds of gender identity as well as sexuality and for the provision of support for those suffering from body dysmorphia. Within a shared support for those rights, however, there is scope for significant discussion.

First, I think we should treat the concerns of feminists with some respect and seriousness. Claudia defines the questioners as "mainly based on radical feminism" and then ascribes to them "the narrow view that

women's oppression is entirely caused by biological differences". But that is a caricature, even of radical feminism.

In fact, all sorts of feminists, not least socialist feminists, have raised concerns. Later in her article this is grudgingly acknowledged when there is mention of feminist arguments rooted in Marxism and materialism. She summarises these as the belief that "biological sex is the basis for women's oppression" and "that gender is a value system designed to maintain the sexual hierarchy". These are important ideas which, if they are mistaken, deserve some serious debunking. This isn't achieved by simply placing inverted commas around words like materialism, as if to dismiss the very idea that there might be some serious points here.

Beyond that Claudia offers the statement that "Workers' Liberty understands that women's oppression is more complex than biology". This understanding goes well beyond WL and is common to all socialist, and very many radical, feminists. To say that women's oppression is "more complex than" biological sex is not to deny that it is nevertheless very much about biological sex.

The oppression of the working class is more complex than what happens at the point of production but it would be evasion and miseducation to take this to mean that the relations of production were unimportant or just one of a number of factors, no more important than any of the others.

As the old Women's Fightback pamphlet, *The Case for Socialist Feminism* stated "That women should be the sex to be subjugated is facilitated by her biological functions". It has been startling to see women and other feminists who defend these ideas dismissed in such cavalier fashion.

### DEFINITIONS

**Secondly, definitions and material realities do matter. The feminists under attack, by and large, define women as a biological sex, humans with specific sexual characteristics including the capacity (typically though with exceptions and as against men) to reproduce.**

Their opponents seem reluctant to define the term at all, more concerned to ensure that it's a description open to anyone who wants to claim it. Is that not a problem? Maybe only

an intellectual problem but surely a problem.

Third, there appears to me to be a persistent use of the terms sex and gender as if they are interchangeable. In this way a social construct which (I assume) we want to see abolished is treated in the same way as a basic biological reality which we cannot.

There is a broader problem with this in that it can reinforce and perpetuate the very gender stereotypes it purports to transcend. The left now is awash with talk of "behaving like a woman", being "a real woman/man". There was a time when we challenged such ideas.

Finally, while I can't decide how much all of this matters in practice, I do think it matters. Maybe some of the practical concerns raised by some feminists are misplaced. For sure some will be less serious than others. However, the rape victim who requests that her counsellor is a natal woman is not a transphobe. The lesbian who refuses to see anyone with a penis as a potential sexual partner is not a bigot.

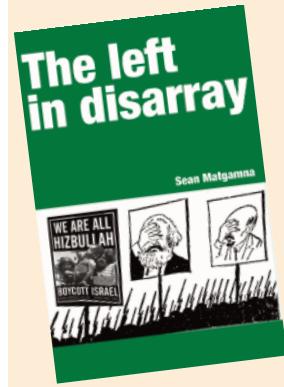
The support and advice given to young people with concerns about their gender identity should be holistic and broad and not assume that transition is always the appropriate response. And the growing number of people who have detransitioned and want to talk about it are in no way equivalent to the gay conversion bigots of the past. I have seen the opposite asserted about all of these issues in recent weeks.

We won't get either the theory and understanding or the public policy issues right if we treat the debate as one between liberationists and oppressors, not least because these debates are also taking place within the trans community and not simply outside it.

**Many feminists who have raised concerns do so not because they "don't yet get it" but because they have genuine questions. We should make an effort to properly address those concerns.**

Patrick Murphy, Leeds

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## Labour's soft Brexit not good enough

**It is very unusual for a Tory MP to say he is "ashamed to be British in many ways". But those were the recent words of Charles Tannock, complaining about his party's stance on Brexit.**

He even went on to say the Tories were "mired in arrogance and hubris... the petty nationalisms, the triumphalism."

Tannock joined criticisms from senior Tories, including the former deputy prime minister Lord Heseltine. These Tories have denounced Theresa May, and openly talked about ditching her in order to prepare for the next election.

But moves to oust May could be a long way off. Most Tories will want to avoid defeat on the European Union (withdrawal) Bill which will be debated in Parliament, starting on Thursday 7 September. Tory backbenchers are under intense pressure not to put amendments to the Bill and not to vote against it. Probably even the softest of Tory soft Brexiteers are too loyal to defy the Tory whips, but some, like Anna Soubry see opposing hard Brexit issue as a matter of principle.

The Tories also face an emboldened Labour Party, with a clearer stance on Brexit. Labour has recently said it favours the UK staying in the single market and the customs union for a long transition and even indefinitely. The party is campaigning to vote down the Bill.

While not many Tories will back a Labour amendment on the single market one tabled by a Tory rebel could get support and it this may be backed by Labour and other parties.

However, most likely the serious confrontations over the Bill will come at the

committee stage when MPs of all parties will put down amendments. The longer the Parliamentary process drags out, the more likely a government defeat will follow.

For Labour to back a Tory amendment on a single market would be a mistake — it would undermine Labour taking a distinct line and risk tying Labour into Tory soft-Brexit political priorities. But there are other problems with Labour's recalibrated stance on Brexit.

Labour has also said it will seek to limit immigration in any final settlement. This is abject. Even Anna Soubry advocates the maintenance of free movement from the EU!

And public opinion is shifting on both Europe and free movement. A new YouGov/Times poll says that 58 per cent of people believe that trading with the EU is a higher priority than controlling EU immigration. A majority of Labour members are also likely to be in favour of defending EU free movement.

**Labour's leadership should get in line with the views of its members and the majority of public opinion. It should make a clear defence of free movement. Not to do so will give ground to the Tory "League of Empire Fantasists".**

**Sign the statement  
of the Labour  
Campaign for Free  
Movement**  
[www.labourfreemovement.org](http://www.labourfreemovement.org)

## Climate change is the problem



**Hurricane Harvey, which began on Friday 25 August and lasted until the middle of the following week hit Texas, Louisiana and Kentucky and especially the coastal areas of Texas.**

Houston, the US's fourth biggest city, spread out over 1700 square miles, was the worst affected. The hurricane displaced one million people, caused 44 deaths and damaged 185,000 homes.

Flooding on this scale, with such tragic effects, is not unique in the world; in recent weeks there have been devastating floods in Mumbai, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sierra Leone, Niger, Nigeria and DR Congo, none of which were as well reported as Hurricane Harvey. However, because Houston is the capital of the global energy industry, it is worth looking at the relationships between events in that city, the behaviour of big business, and climate change.

Many mainstream media reports in the US made no mention of climate change in the reporting of Hurricane Harvey, but local journalists, academics and independent media did discuss this issue, with some saying that Harvey was not even the worst-case scenario. The well-known environmentalist Dr Robert Bullard, based at Texas Southern University in Houston, and interviewed on *Democracy Now*, pulled no punches. "[Houston] was a catastrophe waiting to happen", he said, "given that you have here unrestrained capitalism, no-zoning, laissez faire regulations on the industries that have created the problems of greenhouse gases, the impacts which have been ignored for many years."

While hurricanes can be unpredictable, several characteristics of Hurricane Harvey pointed to three climate change effects. A hotter atmosphere holds more moisture and this tends to make rainfall events more extreme. The waters in the Gulf of Mexico have been getting warmer over the last thirty years and this year were at above average temperatures. The severity and impact of hurricanes on coastal cities are exacerbated by higher sea levels caused by higher temperatures.

But flooding was made worse by the patchy nature of the city's infrastructure including its drainage systems. Building on wetlands and city sprawl means there is not enough permeable soil to help rain drain away. Environmentalists in Houston are now saying that people who live on wetlands should be "bought out" by the city or federal government and the wetlands should be restored. The logic of building the petroleum economy in the city — the concentrated refinement of fossil fuels and pumping out of greenhouse gases — and consequent growth of the city, does not work with the logic of en-

vironment — the natural floodlands of bays. That natural environment urgently needs preserving and managing.

### INEQUALITY

**A survey by the New York Times showed 30% more people from poorer areas making requests for rescue during the flood.**

The effects of the flooding was a study in both social and geographical contrasts. Because Houston is not a zoned city, the building of housing next to oil refineries and other plants is allowed. These "faceline communities" experienced explosions at plants near to their homes (Crosby), emissions of toxins when plants were shut down quickly (Manchester) and storage tanks flooded. People in these areas are predominately from low-income and minority backgrounds. They had nowhere to go and will have to live with the pollution for some time to come.

All this has taken place in a country with a President who claims human-driven global warming is a hoax, who has cut the Federal Emergency Management Agency in charge of disaster response. Yet Donald Trump also wants to build a wall around his golf resort in Ireland to protect it from rising seas!

Jim Blackburn an environmental lawyer based at Houston's Severe Storm Centre has called for more and taller levies to be built down the Houston ship channel. But engineering solutions will not be enough to erase the threats to ways of life for working-class people in Houston. And US workers cannot leave it to Trump, city planners or the major energy firms to get to grips with climate change.

Workers' Liberty's policy on climate change argues for a radical alternative, for a post-petroleum world, where working-class people do not suffer and the environment is not laid waste. We need a fight for a big programme of research and investment to expand renewable energy generation. We advocate and fight for a comprehensive programme of measures to redesign living spaces, cities, industry, transport and other infrastructures to reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions while protecting and improving living standards. This includes fighting for a shorter working week and longer holidays.

**While the labour movement is weak in the US, the country has recently seen the a revival of socialist debate and organising, including around climate change. The UK labour movement should make stronger links with our comrades in the US to take develop these debates.**

• Information from [culturesofenergy.com/](http://culturesofenergy.com/)

# “The horizons of socialism”

**Bhaskar Sunkara, editor of the US socialist magazine *Jacobin*, spoke to Solidarity.**

**What's your assessment of the current political situation in the US, and how is the left responding and developing in that context?**

As counterintuitive as it may seem, especially after a wave of terrible activity from the far right and given who's in the White House, many of the trends are positive. There's a growing trend among young people towards broadly social-democratic politics. More and more people are willing to take part in activism, with a real movement against Trump, albeit a diffuse one. On the far left we're seeing new growth — DSA [Democratic Socialists of America] just hit 26,000 members, up from a historic norm of around 5-6,000. Those 20,000 new members have joined in the past year and a half, and mostly since Trump's election.

We have the populist right in power, and there's a tendency to make politics just about resistance to those forces, for the left to focus our fire against only the right and not the centre. One of the successes of the Bernie Sanders campaign was that it separated a section of liberalism from the Clintonite centre with a positive vision of change.

I always say that the good news is that it's perhaps the best time to be a socialist in the US since the early 1970s. The bad news is that it's still a pretty bad time to be a socialist in the US.

**Many of DSA's 20,000 new members are presumably new to left-wing politics and perhaps quite raw. What's being done to politically educate these people, and what should be done?**

I think *Jacobin* and our reading groups play

a big role in political education, alongside DSA branches developing their own syllabuses. When we integrate new people in the movement, we have to be careful not to inculcate them with the negative aspects of the movement's culture, which has to a large extent been characterised by our defeats and disconnection from any kind of social base.

New members need to know the history of our ideas, and be non-sectarian from a position of knowledge about and engagement with ideas, rather than simply by default. A lot of people on the US left will present themselves as "non-sectarian", but what that often means is that they're simply ignorant about certain political and historical questions.

**Are writers like Hal Draper widely read amongst DSA activists today?**

Among many of us, particularly the "Jacobin" generation of DSA recruits (pre-Bernie, but in our 20s) he is. He will hopefully be read more among others; *The Two Souls of Socialism* does appear on reading lists.

We also have our political tradition and experience, and view of social democracy that differs somewhat from Draper. Unfortunately there is something of a lack of knowledge about the historical orientations of DSA and where it came from, so not many members would necessarily recognise Draper, Shachtman, or other figures of that type. But longer-standing members of DSA, and particularly amongst the leadership, do have that background, so the question is how can we incorporate this into political education without it seemingly like we're just giving abstract history lessons. How do we make it relevant day-to-day?

Broadly speaking the orientation of DSA is towards a socialism that is from below, so in a broad sense we embody that tradition, as opposed to a technocratic vision of either so-



cial democracy or Stalinism. So it's in the organisation's bones, if not on people's lips.

**Alongside, and partially within, the DSA's explosion of membership, there seems to have been a revival of Stalinism, partially online, but also in the real world. What do you think anti-Stalinists need to do to educate new members about Stalinism, and win the political arguments within DSA?**

It's in the nature of being an open organisation that people from different backgrounds are joining. We have a particular politics and tradition, so I would hope that the people joining identify with that. There is a small fringe of people who ironically use Stalinist and Maoist imagery; I don't think it's a big tendency, even among YDSA branches, but the way we deal with it is by not shying away from talking about history.

We win by organising. There is already a social-democratic majority in the United States that we need to tap into and organise. There's plenty of room to the left of that in which we can organise, and as democratic socialism develops deeper social bases, small tendencies like this will become irrelevant.

They're not large enough to be a barrier, but just from the point of view of decency and basic historical understanding, we should explain why we're anti-Stalinists.

**What about industrial struggle? Is DSA giving its new members an orientation to workplace organising and the trade union movement?**

The three main industries our strategy should be focused on, in my view, are supply and logistics; healthcare; and education, particularly schools. There are certainly segments within the DSA who identify these sectors as key. That's important in terms of having an orientation, because many people coming into the left have very vague ideas about organisation. We're a small organisation with finite resources.

Especially in the platform put forward by the DSA Momentum grouping at our recent convention, there was a strong emphasis on rank-and-file organising, as opposed to DSA's traditional approach, which was more to do with just seeking left partners within the trade union bureaucracy. Any resurgent labour movement will have to come through rank-and-file democracy and control.

Especially with the coming of "Right to Work" nationally, and other measures that will further undermine the traditional trade union leadership, we need rank-and-file currents to pose a political alternative, through struggle, in the form of a class-wide unionism that isn't limited to the shop floor.

A lot of young DSAers are looking to get jobs in strategic industries and sectors where they can be rank-and-file union activists. That's definitely encouraged by groups within DSA. Our approach is oriented more and more towards rank-and-file work, driven by unionized workers as opposed to union staff.

I don't want to overstate the social base of DSA, so it should be said that a lot of these workers are recently de-classed graduates, often from professional backgrounds, and many are getting jobs in "white collar" sec-

## The changing economy and politics of Mauritius

### LETTER FROM MAURITIUS

**Twenty years ago, the economy of Mauritius was still based on the sugar industry, mainly exporting to Britain under the terms of the Lomé convention.**

There was also a significant textile industry, with exports to the EU and the USA, and a tourism industry.

Then the sugar oligarchy shifted its focus to finance. From 21 sugar factories, Mauritius is down to four (more mechanised) factories. The sugar cane is still there, but the sugar capitalists have shifted to Africa.

The financial sector has boomed. Some textile industry remains, but it is declining. The tourism industry has boomed.

We have more and more gated communities housing foreign millionaires. The government of Mauritius is offering tax breaks to build "smart cities" to attract wealthy foreigners.

There was full employment in the late

1980s, but unemployment is now officially 8%. From 1964, sugar plantation workers were employed all year round, and there were 100,000 of them. Now there are fewer than 5,000.

Construction jobs have increased. There is a growing IT sector, but it is still a small proportion of the economy. Financial services, serving capitalists doing business in and with Africa, have expanded. A lot of jobs are now short-term or contracted-out.

The economic transformation has led to a weakening of the trade-union movement. The strong sectors were the docks, sugar, and public transport.

The docks were moved into the public sector, and then privatised. Since 1992 there is a freeport (free trade zone, outside the usual taxes and regulations) in St Louis, now employing over 3,000 people.

Mauritius is now importing raw sugar from Brazil, and importing 70 or 80% of its food.

The trade unions' main base now is in the

public sector. The union movement is fragmented. Historically, in Mauritius, trade unions have been set up as offshoots of political parties.

The Mauritius Militant Movement (MMM) initiated many unions. Then it won the general election in 1982. Unions' rank and file structures decayed, check-off systems were introduced, more union jobs were funded by the state, Lalit was pushed out.

Lalit tried to build a rank and file movement in the unions — inter-union base groups. But where those were successful, they mainly just led to new union leaders getting in.

Then we did work with some union leaders to campaign against privatisation. That was not very productive. In fact, Lalit lost some activists to the union bureaucracy through the experience.

Industrial relations in Mauritius has been structured through a publicly-administered award system and regulation orders, aiming to make strikes illegal. Now awards are

being replaced by collective agreements.

The strongest union federation now has about 17,000 members. The total workforce is about 600,000.

Lalit started from a national student strike in 1976, about issues including opposition to secondary-school fees. It was initially a group around a mimeographed discussion magazine within the MMM. That group was heavily involved in the August 1979 general strike (sparked by a dispute over union recognition in the sugar industry, and job cuts in other sectors).

In 1982 the MMM won the general election and took over the government. Lalit became an independent organisation, and has continued as such since.

**Lalit has sought a variety of international links, attending international events called by the "Lambertist" current, by the SWP, by Lutte Ouvrière, by Links in Australia, and by the Fourth International.**

- From the Mauritian group Lalit — [www.lalitmauritius.org](http://www.lalitmauritius.org)

tors, but it's still a good start.

**McDonald's workers in the UK are currently balloting for strikes. What's your assessment of the fast food workers' movement in the US? Is that opening up routes for the labour movement into other sectors of the low-paid economies?**

It's a great thing. But let's admit that one of the reasons it's been palatable to a section of the union bureaucracy in the United States is that "Fight for \$15" events are often framed not to disrupt capital, but for the media buzz they can generate. We should be aware of the limits of that kind of approach.

We should talk in terms of strategic sectors and ability to create disruption at the point of production. Sometimes these terms are seen, at least on the US left, in a very moralistic way. If we use terms like "point of production" or "social weight", it's alleged that you're saying workers in different industries aren't equal. Of course that's not true; at a moral and ethical level, all workers' struggles matter equally. But with finite resources, we need to think about what are the key sectors to engage with.

"Fight for \$15" is an important campaign, that has gained a lot of resonance and changed political discourse, but beyond that, we need to think about key industrial sectors like logistics, healthcare, and education, where the left can conceivably build something of a base. We should encourage young people joining socialist groups at university to get jobs in these industries where they can do union work.

**There have been some reports of small left-wing groupings in heavily Trump/Republican territory, for example in the south, who are pro-gun-ownership but also radically progressive?**

I wouldn't say it's widespread, and it's still developing a social base. I do think it's the case that many of these traditionally conservative areas are open, perhaps not quite to our politics, but certainly to the politics of Bernie Sanders.

These groups are in no sense defining the resistance to Trump, though. The face of that resistance at the moment is typified by something like the Women's March; that should give us hope, because it was big and filled with people who have engaged in mass politics before, but there were limits to its level of organisation and politicisation, which is partially why it faded away.

The key for the left is to continue to put forward an affirmative agenda around things like the struggle for universal healthcare, and not just fall into a purely reactive anti-Trumpism. We need a sword and a shield at the same time. A lot of the left wants to just have the shield.

**Where's the debate at, in DSA and more generally on the left, on the question of political representation? If the DSA isn't pursuing a traditional "realignment" strategy, what political strategy should it pursue?**

We should organise as much as we can outside of the Democratic Party. A combination of the building of the social forces of the left, and objective social conditions, will at some point lead to a fracturing of the two-party system, but then a recomposition of it. So for a year or two you might see four parties in US politics, but because we have a first-past-the-post electoral system things will narrow



down to a two-party system again. I would hope that one of the parties left standing will be a labour-backed, broad-left party with anticapitalist currents.

That's a vision that isn't based in the classic "realignment" strategy; we're not going into the Democratic Party and trying to push it leftwards. On the other hand, I have no hesitation in saying that I would have voted for Hilary Clinton in a swing state. There's a certain vision of independent political action on the left that can constrain our tactical flexibility. In a social struggle, if a centrist trade union leader wants to get involved, you'd take the help while making the critique; in the same way, in the Democratic Party there are certain races where I'd vote for a progressive Democrat – or even, in the case of a national election, in a swing state, for a Clinton-type Democrat.

There's a difference between casting a critical vote and campaigning for someone. With our finite resources, the socialist left should not be campaigning for even the Elizabeth Warrens of the world.

This is my opinion I'm giving, but I do think there's a broad and growing consensus within DSA around something like this — shifting away from "realignment", talking more openly about the need for independent political action, and that's willing to run in local races as independents, for example in a city like New York.

We could potentially become the second party in New York. We have over 2,000 members in New York City alone. The political machine is weak, it's a one-party Democratic town, and I see no reason why we can't compete.

But at the national level, that's not something you can just will into being. How do we build our forces to the point where it's viable to have real independent political action, as opposed to a small group claiming to speak for the working class? That's been the approach of a lot of left-wing third-partyism in the US.

**We may well soon have a Corbyn government in Britain. You have various examples – Syriza, Mitterand in the early 1980s – of governments being elected with left-**

**ist reform programmes, which haven't ended well. How can the left in Britain start to raise those issues, and work to ensure that a Corbyn government turns out differently?**

Mitterand failed because his government was trying to make a radical reform of capitalism in an era in which that was essentially impossible, due to the constraints of European integration and the broader crisis of capitalism. Capital flight and the ability of capital to withhold investment killed his project.

What Corbynism is trying to achieve is far more modest than what the French Socialists were trying to achieve. Can the NHS be restored? Yes, of course. Can certain key services and infrastructure be renationalised? Of course. Can basic investments be made into public housing and education? Of course. Those are not particularly radical demands. There'll be resistance, but Corbyn's basic programme is perfectly achievable.

**Capital has had thirty years of having everything its own way; the hysteria around Labour's limited programme does not suggest a great degree of willingness to concede. We're not of the school that says reforms are impossible, but in a sense, isn't the balance of forces – in terms of the ideological strength of the left, the level of organisation and combativeness of the workers' movement, and the aggressiveness of capital – in many ways less favourable?**

Yes, the terrain is less favourable. But I do think the fact that the demands are in themselves less radical does change things. It also matters that the UK is a massive economy, with more flexibility than Greece or others have to carry out these basic programmes. Of course, it's heavily financialized

The successes, or the productive failures, of trying to push these reforms through, against resistance, will shape what will happen after Corbynism. Right now, the struggles within the Labour left are the vehicles to win immediate reforms and re-cohere the workers' movement to the point where we could imagine pushing for more radical things down the road.

It's key that we win something. People won't just keep mobilising unless they see some results.

**You talk about raising more radical things "down the road", but don't you have the start raising things in the here-and-now, even to make them winnable "down the road"? We've been pushing the policy of public ownership of the banks. At the moment that's quite a marginal policy, but don't you have to start raising things like that now to win them in the future? We shouldn't be sectarian: it's not about denouncing the existing programme, but about finding ways to start pushing its limits.**

We need to maintain the horizon of socialism. We can't just say this programme of immediate reforms is our whole programme. We should support those reforms, earnestly, but we need to have horizons beyond them.

Michael Harrington, DSA's founder, used to talk about the "tightrope". He said that on the one hand, you could be a small group with its own ideological vision and just talks about that; on the other, you could dissolve into the movement, and just go where the movement is. The "tightrope" between those two is to engage in the broader movement, but have your vision, and work out how the two relate to each other. You seek to win people to your vision, but your vision should also be shaped by changes and developments in the movement.

We need to maintain fundamental criticisms about the limits of parliamentary socialism, and be clear about the level of mobilisation needed to accomplish things. The need for rupture. We need to talk about these things, but we also need to be humble about the fact that the far left, in the US or the UK, doesn't have a deep social base. The way to rebuilding one is via struggles in the Labour Party in the UK, and in the US via engagement with the "Berniecrats". I fully support Bernie Sanders. I have criticisms of him, but when I campaign for him, I am fully and earnestly campaigning for him.

**But we do have to maintain our critical faculties about everything, including within the left.**

# The Google memo and real bias

## SCIENCE

By Les Hearn

**James Damore, the recently (and perhaps unjustly) fired Google employee, criticised in an online memo<sup>1</sup> what he sees as the “left bias” of Google which has created a “politically correct monoculture” which “shames dissenters into silence.”**

This left bias translates as “Compassion for the weak; disparities are due to injustices; humans are inherently cooperative; change is good (unstable); open; idealist.” A right bias would hold views such as “Respect for the strong/authority; disparities are natural and just; humans are inherently competitive; change is dangerous; closed; pragmatic.”

Like all stereotypes, these caricatures have some elements of truth and Damore is keen to distance himself from both but in reality he comes down on one side.

Put simply, Google’s stated policy is to encourage groups which are under-represented in their current workforce to apply for jobs or promotion. These include: women, around 50% of the population (31% overall in Google; 20% in technical posts; 48% in non-technical posts, doubtless lower-paid; 25% in leadership positions); black people (undefined but presumably African Americans), 13.3% of the US population (2% overall; 1% technical; 5% non-technical (lower-paid); 2% leadership); Hispanics, 17.6% of the population (4% overall; 3% technical; 5% non-technical; 2% leadership).<sup>2</sup>

To reiterate, there is a marked imbalance in the employment of black and Hispanic people in all areas of Google and of women in all but non-technical posts, relative to the US population. Damore chooses to focus his arguments on Google’s attempts to redress the balance for women. His arguments do not deal with ethnic or other minorities (except, curiously, conservatives) but his concluding suggestions do!<sup>3</sup>

He then produces a series of truisms and half-truths about male-female differences which he proposes as “possible non-bias causes of the gender gap in tech [i.e. software engineering].” He himself accepts that he is talking about averages and that there is a substantial overlap between the sexes so nothing can be deduced about any individual. He therefore sets a high bar if he expects these differences to account for a 20:80 split in tech jobs.<sup>2</sup>

Damore refers to biological differences that he claims are universal across cultures, highly heritable, linked to prenatal testosterone, and “exactly what we would predict from an evolutionary psychology perspective.” These include, he says, “openness directed towards feelings and aesthetics rather than ideas...a stronger interest in people rather than things...empathising versus systemizing.” This may direct them towards social or artistic areas (why then are there more male composers and painters?). It is not clear how this makes women less suitable (on average) to code software programs (or men to be more suitable to be managers).

There is also “extroversion expressed as gregariousness rather than assertiveness.” Damore says this results in women being less likely to ask for raises, speaking up ...or leading. Google has tried to counter the reticence of women to put themselves forward for promotion. They sent an email to all engineers quoting studies showing that (1) girls don’t tend to raise their hands to answer maths problems, though they are more often right



James Dunmore. What problem at Google?

than boys; and (2) women don’t tend to volunteer ideas in business meetings, though their thoughts are often better than those of male colleagues: the email also reminded recipients that it was time to apply for promotion. Applications from women soared, and with greater success than for male engineers. It is not clear why Damore would object to this.<sup>4</sup>

Damore points to evidence that women show more neuroticism than men but his source (Wikipedia) points out that this concept is not well-defined. He also says that higher status is more likely to be a male goal, using the lack of women in top jobs as evidence (thus assuming what he set out to prove). Curiously, he sees the preponderance of men in dangerous jobs such as coal-mining, fire-fighting and garbage collection(!) as part of their drive for status.

What Damore does not mention is that cultural and individual sexism and misogyny discourage some (many?) girls and women from pursuing studies and careers in areas that have historically been denied to them or away from which they have been directed by peers, family or advisers. If girls and women were encouraged to see software development as something that was open to them, where they would be welcomed, but they still didn’t apply in equal numbers, then we could perhaps start looking for other explanations.

The question of welcoming is crucial. If male employees disrespect or sexually harass them, women may not wish to stay.<sup>5</sup> It is likely that, with encouragement at school and college, and with a non-discriminatory working environment, instead of 20:80, something approaching balance would be achieved: it might not be 50:50 — it might conceivably be 60:40 — who knows?

According to Wendy Hall, a computer science professor, there isn’t such an imbalance in several Asian countries, indicating cultural rather than biological influences on gender imbalance in US information technology companies.<sup>6</sup> Professor Hall refers to a decrease in women on computer science courses in UK universities from 25% in 1978 to 10% in 1987. In the US, women’s participation in historically male-dominated fields such as medicine, law, physical sciences rose from about 10% in 1970 to between 40 and 50% in 2010; computer science followed the same trajectory from about 12% in 1970 to about 37% in 1985 but thereafter declined to around 18% in 2010 (from blogger Faruk Ateş).<sup>7</sup> We have to look for explanations for these changes, other than biological ones.

Ateş points out that many pioneers of com-

puting and programming were women but that, from the late 1960s, women were actively discouraged from going into computing by professional organisations, ad campaigns, and by aptitude tests that favoured men. Stereotypes of computer programmers as awkward male nerds appeared in films in the 1980s. Ateş and Hall also refer to

the marketing of video games on home computers, such as Sinclair and Amstrad, preferentially to boys in the 1980s, giving an impression that “technology is for boys, not girls.” Other scientists have also argued against Damore, including Angela Saini,<sup>8</sup> and Erin Giglio.<sup>9</sup>

A number of scientists have weighed in on Damore’s side, claiming that his views are in line with research findings on sex differences. Thus males tend to be “thing-oriented” and females to be “people-oriented” and women’s and men’s interests tend to match job preferences. Therefore, we should expect imbalances in gender ratios for jobs. (The fact that “women’s” jobs tend to be paid less is just a massive coincidence.) One study asks subjects about their preferences for these jobs: “car mechanic, costume designer, builder, dance teacher, carpenter, school teacher, electrical engineer, florist, inventor(!), and social worker.” No doctor, lawyer, bus-driver, paramedic, politician, accountant...

A closer look at many jobs show that the duties do not easily split into either “thing-oriented” or “people-oriented,” being more a mixture. Further, the proportions of men and women in some occupations have varied enormously over history: examples include physical labour occupations during wartime, or in other countries, and the medical profession from the 19th century, when women were banned, to now when a majority of entrants to medical school are women.

What is disturbing is that these scientists choose to investigate sex differences to explain observed gender imbalances in occupations when we already have a perfectly good explanation — the different experiences of boys and girls. Boy and girl children are treated differently by their mothers and significant others right from birth and, even in the supposedly egalitarian societies of the West, sex roles and expectations are reinforced throughout childhood and beyond. It may be that the “natural” ratio in software engineering is not 50:50 but we will never know since we don’t have a Planet B for comparison.

It is also disturbing that the research itself does not clearly show many statistically significant differences between the sexes that are relevant to suitability for software engineering. For every study showing some effect (such as higher general intelligence (“g”) scores) in men, there is another not showing this. Further, where there are well-documented differences, for example in visuo-spatial skills such as mental rotation, these can be reduced or removed with training.

To Damore’s credit, he suggests ways to make software engineering more woman-friendly (making programming more people-oriented and collaborative, fostering cooperation, making tech and leadership jobs less stressful, offering more part-time work, and, intriguingly, freeing men from their current inflexible gender role, allowing them to become more “feminine”).

However, Damore incorrectly sees Google’s encouragement of applications from historically under-represented groups as discriminatory, failing to recognise that, even if women would not necessarily take up tech jobs in equal proportion to men, there is no reason other than discrimination (not just at Google) for black and Hispanic people to be seriously under-represented in Google as a whole and especially in tech and leadership jobs.<sup>3</sup> In the absence of any better policies, his proposals would perpetuate the present unfair treatment of African Americans and other oppressed minorities.

**There is bias in Google and in the job world in general but it’s against women and minorities, not against white men like James Damore.**

### Notes:

1. <https://medium.com/@Cernovich/full-james-damore-memo-uncensored-memo-with-charts-and-cites-339f3d2d05f>

2. [www.google.com/diversity/](http://www.google.com/diversity/)

3. Damore’s suggestions include “Stop restricting programs and classes to certain genders or races.” One programme cited is BOLD. Google states that “The BOLD Immersion program is open to all higher education students, and is committed to addressing diversity in our company and the technology industry. Students who are members of a group that is historically under-represented in this field are encouraged to apply.” Another is CSSI. Google describes this as being for “graduating high school seniors with a passion for technology — especially students from historically underrepresented groups in the field.” It is odd that Damore interprets this as “restricting ... to certain genders or races.” He also mentions Google’s Engineering Practicum intern programme which states that it is for “under-graduate students with a passion for technology — especially students from historically underrepresented groups including women, Native American, Black, Latino, Veteran and students with disabilities” [all emphases mine]. I suppose it is an occasion for rejoicing that Damore doesn’t oppose Google’s encouragement of veterans and people with disabilities to apply. This is in the context of only 2% of Google’s employees being Black (population average 13%) and 4% Hispanic (18% of population).

4. [www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2014/04/02/google-data-mines-its-women-problem/?utm\\_term=.87a62e59d73d](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2014/04/02/google-data-mines-its-women-problem/?utm_term=.87a62e59d73d)

5. This survey reveals that 87% of female tech staff responding had experienced demeaning comments from colleagues and 60% had received unwanted sexual advances. Individual stories range from infuriating to sick-making: [www.elephantinthevalley.com](http://www.elephantinthevalley.com)

6. <https://theconversation.com/growing-role-of-artificial-intelligence-in-our-lives-is-too-important-to-leave-to-men-82708>

7. <https://hackernoon.com/a-brief-history-of-women-in-computing-e7253ac24306>

8. Angela Saini, author of *Inferior: How Science Got Women Wrong*, deals with some of Damore’s points in the *Guardian*: [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/aug/07/silicon-valley-weapon-choice-women-google-manifesto-gender-difference-eugenics](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/aug/07/silicon-valley-weapon-choice-women-google-manifesto-gender-difference-eugenics)

9. Erin Giglio, a PhD student in evolutionary biology and behaviour and a graduate in psychology and genetics (and blogger), cites peer-reviewed evidence contradicting Damore’s arguments: <https://medium.com/@tweetingmouse/the-truth-has-got-its-boots-on-what-the-evidence-says-about-mr-damores-google-memo-bc93c8b2f9db>

# 1917 and problems of democracy

Andrew Coates reviews *The Russian Revolution: When the workers took power* by Paul Vernadsky

The historian of the French Revolution, François Furet, wrote in 1995 that after the fall of the USSR, the October Revolution had ended its journey. Unlike the first French Republic, Soviet power, and Lenin, "left no heritage".

Over 800 pages later the critic of the Jacobins concluded that while it was hard to "think" of another kind of society, democracy manufactured the need for a world beyond "Capital and the Bourgeoisie". If the figure of the Bolshevik party had disappeared, the "idea of communism" could be reborn in new forms.<sup>1</sup>

Twenty-two years later, on the anniversary of the October Revolution, much debate on the left remains about how to assess the legacy of the Bolsheviks. Many reject Lenin's party, arguing that movements for socialism or communism should seek novel constituencies, structures and objectives.

In contrast to these judgements, Paul Vernadsky begins *The Russian Revolution* by asserting, "The Russian revolution of 1917 was the greatest event in political history so far. It was the first occasion that working class people took political power and held it for a significant period." He states, "In October 1917 the Russian working class, led by the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP, Bolshevik party), took power through their mass, democratic soviets (councils)." The lessons of the revolution remain relevant to working class politics today.<sup>2</sup>

Vernadsky tells the story of 1917, from the slaughter of the First World War, initial protests and strikes, to the February Revolution and October. The Bolshevik resurgence faced with a Kerensky-led government determined to continue the war, the July Days when the state was on the brink of a hard-right clampdown, to the dissolution of the elected Constituent Assembly in January 1918 and its replacement by Soviet Power.

Celebrating the Carnival of the Oppressed, the "creative transformations" unleashed by the workers "ruling their own state", he outlines the progressive decrees issued by the new Soviet government, beginning with the delivery of the slogan: "all land to the peasants".

"Without the RSDLP, the Russian Revolution would not have occurred."<sup>3</sup> The Russian Revolution is not just a history of events. Vernadsky offers a valuable introduction to debates about this party, the Bolsheviks, much of which was stimulated by Lars Lih's *Lenin Rediscovered: What is to be done in context*. Other writers covered include Lenin enthusiast Paul le Blanc, and Tom Twiss's measured account of Trotsky's evolving

contradictory views of the development of bureaucracy in the wake of revolution. There is a strong section on the Women's Revolution, paying special attention to the "futuristic vision of Aleksandra Kollontai, as illuminated by studies of "Bolshevik feminists".

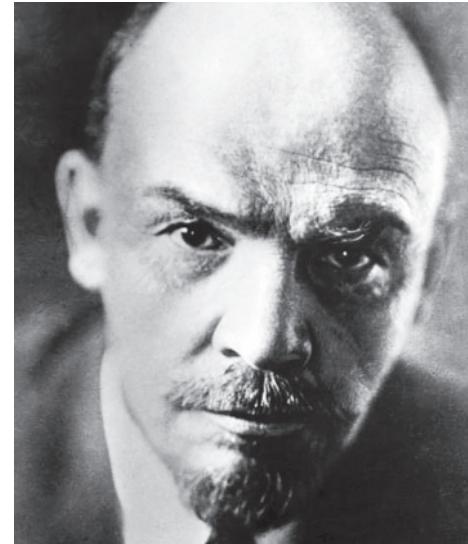
Other areas in which members of Workers' Liberty have contributed important debate figure in this context. Of particular interest are the critical sections on Lenin's theory of imperialism in the chapter 'War and the Myth of Defeatism', inspired by Hal Draper's studies. Unlike knee-jerk 'anti-imperialists' the author cites Trotsky: "working-class policy on war is not "automatically derived from the policy of the bourgeoisie, bearing only the opposite sign..."<sup>4</sup> One imagines that some quarters will reject the passages on nationalities, including the Jewish Question. In his conclusion Vernadsky is clear that "Israeli Jews are a nation and they should have the right to self determination today like any other nation."<sup>5</sup>

Lih argued that the Bolsheviks were a lot more than, as the party leader Zinoviev put it in his lectures in 1923, a "hierarchical, closely knit organisation", run from the top-down to enlighten the workers. It was not a "party of a new type", but in the mould of democratic Marxist based organisations of the Second International, above all the German Social Democrats (SPD).

Although it had its own stamp by operating in autocratic conditions, Lenin was, in key works such as *What is to be Done?* "directly inspired" by the German "model". In more detail Lenin's strategy was designed to bring together the "purposive worker" and the social democratic worldview conveyed by practical-minded activists, by the "power of a genuinely sound explanation." The Bolsheviks, if this account stands, were very far from political outriders, a messianic party-sect, but part of the mainstream of European socialism.<sup>6</sup>

Lih saw this as the basis for "fighting for democracy to the end" as a precondition for workers' power, and socialism. For Lih this "old Bolshevik" stand guided Lenin right up to October and the overthrow of the Provisional government, "to carry out a thorough-going democratic transformation". Vernadsky enters into the — lengthy — debate on this claim.

He states that Lenin's assessment of the growth of the soviets and soldiers' committees meant that his call for the overthrow of the Provisional government meant that Lenin took "steps towards permanent revolution". That is, an acceleration of revolutionary "stages" towards, he contentiously asserts, a position where the victories of the Bolsheviks, "deconstructed capitalist relations of production and put in place an economic system where the imperative was social need,



How should we assess Lenin's model of the party?

not private profit." It is undeniable that this prospect inspired millions inside and outside Russia, with the hope that socialism was on the agenda. For many of us that wish still burns.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, many unresolved issues remain to be discussed from this thought-provoking book. Two could be signalled; questions about the body that "led" the Russian working class, and the direction it began to take them in the aftermath of October.

If we accept the view that the Bolsheviks were a democratic party with open debate and a real base in the working class and popular masses, what kind of template had Lenin and his tendency adopted?

A critical description of the pre-1914 SPD "oligarchy" by Robert Michels developed themes already circulating on the left in Germany itself, and internationally by "revolutionary syndicalists" like the French writer Georges Sorel. In light of the monstrous oligarchy of Stalinist bureaucracy these limits inside Lenin's "model" apparatus might inspire further reflection. Only Lenin's most uncritical admirers would deny problems about the practices of "committee people", however small in number they may have been initially, brought into the "smashed" state machine.<sup>8</sup>

The next is that even supporters do not argue that in power the Bolsheviks were always democratic. Many would also question as to how far they respected workers' democracy they contrasted to "formal" Parliamentary pluralism. The well-documented cases of human rights abuses, which began with October, and were accelerated by the creation of the Cheka, cannot be explained away by "external conditions", the civil war, and the need for Red Terror to stave off the very real threat of a far-right regime that would have

drowned the revolution in blood.

The need for independent law, in however difficult circumstances, respect for the people's rights, was denied during the dictatorship of the proletariat.

What kind of political instrument can introduce non-capitalist relations of production with these limits on democratic decision-making? Socialism was, and is, far from a self-evident thing. How can a transitional mode of production to communism be formed without free debate about what kind of economy, what kind of production, what social goals people are working towards?

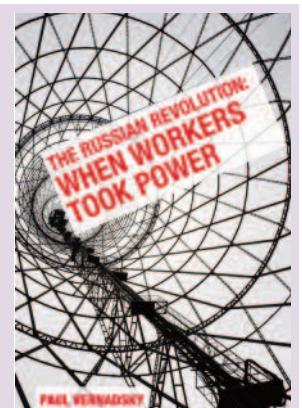
Outlawing opposition papers, bourgeois, then all non-Bolshevik parties, ignoring the voices of "non-party" workers, stifled not just conflicting views but fostered the belief that those doing the outlawing knew better than anybody else.

**It was under Lenin that Soviet democracy was finished off. It was in the early 1920s that the acceptance of a military and political police entered into what would become the established doctrine of the dictatorship of the proletariat — the first, far from "temporary", stage to socialism. This is a very negative lesson from the Russian revolution.<sup>9</sup>**

#### Notes

1. Pages 8 and 809. *Le passé d'une illusion*. François Furet. Éditions Robert Laffont. 1995.
2. Pages 9 and 19. *The Russian Revolution. When the workers took power*. Paul Vernadsky.
3. Page 114. Paul Vernadsky *Op cit*.
4. Page 197. Paul Vernadsky *Op cit*
5. Page 346. Paul Vernadsky *Op cit*
6. Page 398. *Lenin Rediscovered: What is to be done in context*. Brill. 2005.
7. On Lih Pages 163-9. Next quote, Page 19. Paul Vernadsky *Op cit. Political Parties*. Robert Michels. Georges Sorel in 1902 had already written of the SPD's "spirit of authoritarianism and bureaucracy in a New Church run like a huge civil service ("administration") page 188. *L'illusion du politique. Gorges Sorel et le débat intellectuel* 1900. Schlomo Sand. La Découverte, 1984.
8. "La démocratie soviétique a été définitivement étouffée au moment de l'interdiction des partis soviétiques, après la guerre civile, et non pas lorsque l'alternative était soit capituler devant les Blancs, soit défendre la révolution par tous les moyens. Elle fut donc étouffée après la victoire, alors qu'aucune armée blanche n'était plus présente sur le territoire de la Russie des soviets. Ernest Mandel. *Octobre 1917 : Coup d'Etat ou révolution sociale ? La légitimité de la révolution russe*. Cahiers d'Etudes et de Recherches, n°17/18, 1992. *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat from Marx to Lenin*, Hal Draper. Monthly Review Press. 1987.
- Andrew blogs at: [tendancecoatesy.wordpress.com](http://tendancecoatesy.wordpress.com)

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## Sunday 11 September

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1pm, ExCeL London, Royal Victoria Dock, London E16 1XL  
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## Sunday 11 September

Ritzy strike solidarity rally with Chris Williamson MP & Helen Hayes MP  
6pm, Windrush Square, Brixton, London SW2 1JG  
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## Thursday 14 September

All London bus driver demonstration  
9am, City Hall, London SE1 2AA  
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## Thursday 14 September

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## Friday 15 September

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# "A chance to put my principles into practice"

A Workers' Liberty activist and Picturehouse striker spoke to *Solidarity* about the strike, the Labour Party and why they joined Workers' Liberty.

**How did you end up getting involved in the Picturehouse strike?**

I've always had an interest in workers' struggles, and the Picturehouse strike has been the first time that I could take part in one, so straight off the bat I was like "Let's do this, I'm behind this." At first I was a bit cautious because I was on probation, and you have a contract so it's easier for them to get rid of you. But after about two months, I thought "I'm a decent worker — let's do this". I went on strike when I was still on probation, and the company didn't do anything.

**Did that mean that other workers on probation got involved as well?**

Yeah, a few of them. I think it galvanised a few of the newer workers, but I think they were still a bit cautious. In January they had a crackdown and used excuses to get rid of a few workers, and hired new ones on probation. But then the new probation workers were sent an email saying they didn't have to work on strike days if they felt uncomfortable — meaning most probation workers didn't work. Unfortunately this has since been reversed by the company. Now they rely on probation workers, and workers from other cinemas who are brought in to cover strike days.

**Where is the dispute going next and what needs to be done to win it?**

We've just re-balloted, and won that re-ballot. We will be striking again from late September, or early October, through to December. The way to win is more strike days. This period of Autumn to Winter is when all the big movies come out, it's when our company makes a lot of money, so we need to strike at this time. We need to organise more strikes during film festivals, during Star Wars, all the big releases, and try to mobilise allies like those in the Labour Party, Workers' Liberty, any left-wing people who are sympathetic to the workers at this cinema, get out there, even if there's not a strike going on — organise community demonstrations and flyering sessions. Spread the word to boycott this cinema. Ultimately the only thing Picturehouse bosses understand is money. So losing money is the only thing that will really get their attention, that will get them to take notice. They will be forced to sit down with us as we have the power to affect how much money they make.

**How did you end up becoming**



**interested in workers' struggles?**

I was seventeen when they raised tuition fees to £9000 a year. I remember feeling angry, I took part in the student demonstrations of 2010. Obviously, we lost and fees went up, but I still thought people should fight and take part in collective action: if we can come together, if we can act as one solid unit, we can take down these people. I became politicised but didn't really put it into practice: student politics never really interested me, I was never part of any unionised workplace, so when I joined this workplace and it had already started unionising, I was like, this is it, this is the chance for me to really put my principles into practice.

**How did you meet Workers' Liberty and why did you join?**

We'd had a few leftwing organisations turn up to our picket lines, but of them all, I think Workers' Liberty were definitely the most active, and most useful, as opposed to the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Party, who offered nothing except their newspapers and the chance to turn up to a few of their things. Workers' Liberty would turn up and give us advice on how to organise, how to organise workers, and organised fundraisers for us, as well as political ideas. Workers' Liberty may be one of the smaller groups that I've come across but it is the most effective, and I thought, "Yeah, I wanna get involved with these guys."

The SP and SWP seemed like a bunch of old, sectarian people who were not very open to debate. Workers' Liberty is, and I wanted to get involved in a democratic organisation where I can voice my opinions without being hounded out.

**When we interviewed Kelly, she said it's been very interesting at work because strikes had been happening alongside big political events, like Trump, Brexit, Jeremy Corbyn, the general election this year. Have discussions around politics changed at work?**

Yes, especially during the general

election, people were very much politicised. A few of my colleagues at work canvassed for the Labour Party and a few of my colleagues came up to me saying, "Before I started working here I had no interest in politics." It's interesting — there's the strike action going on at the same time as other politics, for example John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn are in support of our strike, which has created a connection, and people are starting to see at work that there is a connection between trade union disputes, industrial action, workers' struggles and the wider political landscape.

**What needs to be done to grow that connection so more workers are involved in the Labour Party or other campaigns?**

The Labour Party reaching out to workplaces, organising socials. You want the most conscious workers leading from the front, educating their colleagues at the same time. So it's a two-way front of workers reaching out to political organisations and political organisations reaching out to the workers.

**What would you say to young activists who have become interested in politics, for example through the Corbyn surge? What should they do?**

Get involved in politics — not just voting every few years. Join the Labour Party. Take part in the democratic processes in the Labour Party, vote for candidates, canvass, campaign and if you're in a workplace, join a union. Or where there is no union, be the first, make it a domino effect so there's more in every workplace.

**The thing about trade unions is, not only do they provide collective power to workers because they're this massive unit, they also provide a framework to politicise people and educate people who aren't politicised.**

• A longer version of this interview can be found online at: [bit.ly/2eB667G](http://bit.ly/2eB667G)

• The interview with Kelly can be found online at: [bit.ly/2in30sB](http://bit.ly/2in30sB)

## Events

# Council reneges on bins deal

By Jim Denham

Birmingham refuse workers have returned to the picket lines after the Labour city council reneged on a deal and sent out redundancy notices.

Mountains of rubbish bags piled up on street corners before the last seven-week strike was suspended on 16 August after Unite and the council struck a deal at ACAS.

Now the council leadership has inexplicably torn up the deal (incredibly, even claiming that there never had been any deal!) and cancelled a meeting on Friday that had been called to ratify the settlement. Even ACAS has contradicted the council leader and confirmed that the council and Unite had reached an agreement.

More bin collections are now likely to be missed with many of the city's streets still strewn with overflowing wheelie bins.

Unite has said it will re-ballot members, meaning industrial action could extend until the New Year. The union is also considering extending the action to other council workers and services.

Unite assistant general secretary Howard Beckett said: "This is a



deeply provocative act that drives a coach and horses through the agreement Unite reached with the council in good faith at the conciliation service Acas.

"It does a great disservice to the people of Birmingham and the city's refuse workers who now face being made redundant and losing their livelihoods or pay cuts of thousands of pounds."

"Unite calls on the council to come to its senses and withdraw these redundancy notices to avoid the disruption of industrial action.

"John Clancy [council leader] has said there was no deal in place, which is just outrageous. It is completely contrary to the ACAS statement that says there's agreement in principle for the Grade 3 to remain,

and consequently no redundancy steps are in place.

"The council is in a shambles. They have rowed back from a good agreement and have returned us to industrial chaos.

"We will be balloting across the council because I am now convinced that this is an ideological message the council is sending out — that they intend cuts, and cuts widely to the workforce."

South Birmingham Momentum, which prior to the 16 August suspension of action, was actively supporting the workers, will now resume its solidarity activities, and demand that the council honours the ACAS deal.

**Consideration is also being given to a possible call for John Clancy's resignation.**



Working conditions in Sports Direct have hit the headlines again after the Guardian reported that warehouse workers were being asked to touch ?happy or sad emoji faces? to indicate their satisfaction with working conditions. The touch pad faces are apparently linked to the warehouse's fingerprint system, thus identifying members who are unhappy with working conditions to management. Unite called demonstrations, such as this one in Nottingham, outside Sports Direct stores on Saturday 2 September in response.

# Derby TAs may strike again

By Ralph Peters

Teaching Assistants, who are members of Unison, in Derby may be forced into a dispute with the council again following 75 days of industrial action in the last year.

The dispute, that saw up to 600 teaching assistants strike, seemed to result in a partial victory 4 months ago when the council unilaterally implemented a new contract that saved some from wage cuts but still led to wage losses of up to 25% for many.

The council agreed to review the grading of workers that had led to the wage reduction. Farcically the excuse for the pay reductions of the

overwhelmingly women workforce was an equal pay review! For years the absence of a fair salary and appropriate grading for school support staff was hidden by the fact that many are on term-time only contracts.

Councils elsewhere had gone through pay reviews and overcome these problems for school support staff without these savage cuts in pay. Derby council, over the period of the summer months, could have played catch-up and met with Unison to resolve this issue.

Instead whilst union representatives had been ready to meet the council, there has been silence from the council and the deadline of 1 September for resolution has now passed.

In fact, union members have been alarmed by comments from some councillors to the effect that the council may continue to implement their inflexible interpretation of a 52 week contract, i.e. that workers either work in school downtime (even though there may be no work for them) or accept savage pay cuts.

Derby Unison members have been joining the Labour Party in some numbers over the last year. They intend to protest there in the lead up to selections of council candidates.

**They are hoping that newly elected Derby North MP and former council leader Chris Williamson will speak up for them.**

# D00 strikes need driver support

By Gemma Short

RMT train guards fighting Driver-Only Operation (D00) struck again, on Southern and Northern rail on 1 and 4 September and on Merseyrail on 1, 3 and 4 September.

Meetings between RMT and train operators have produced nothing, and Arriva Rail North (who run the Northern network) said they only wanted to discuss the "terms of surrender" by the union!

Despite train drivers' union Aslef not being in dispute at Merseyrail

or Northern, all Merseyrail drivers continue to respect RMT picket lines and some are doing the same at Northern.

**RMT pickets on Southern at Brighton were harassed by police and Southern managers on the 1 September strike, when police and managers tried to demand they leave as the area was "private property", and falsely claimed the picket was being conducted without complying with the Trade Union Act requirement of a picket supervisor.**

Follow our Northern Rail bul-

letin On Guard:  
[bit.ly/onguardblog](http://bit.ly/onguardblog)

## Train cleaners ballot

Cleaners working for Southern and Southeastern railways will be balloted by the RMT in two separate disputes over pay and working conditions.

The cleaners are employed by two different cleaning contractors — Wettons on Southeastern and Churchill on Southern.

**The ballot closes on 21 September.**

# Riverboats workers win reinstatement

The threat of strikes by captains and mates on Thames riverboats company City Cruises has won reinstatement for Hairia Abdo, a member of City Cruises customer services staff.

The company was so rattled by the threat of industrial action that they reinstated Hairia before her appeal hearing had even taken place.

# Argos workers three-week strike

By Charlotte Zalens

Unite members at Argos distribution centres have just finished a three-week long strike in a long-running dispute over bosses using a dodgy method of transferring their contracts to different companies which allows bosses to sack people without paying proper redundancy pay.

The strike covers sites in Basildon in Essex, Bridgwater in Somerset, Heywood in Manchester, Barton near Burton-on-Trent, and Castleford in west Yorkshire.

Workers plan more strikes to disrupt the start of Argos busy period



leading up to Christmas.

**Unite has also caught the company using agency workers to cover striking workers' jobs during the strikes, which is illegal.**



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## All-out attack on French workers

**Olivier Delbeke, a CGT activist, and a contributor to the socialist newsletter *Arguments pour la lutte sociale*, on the new draconian labour laws**

After dragging out a sham consultation which had nothing in common with real negotiations (because many aspects of the proposed laws were not revealed to the trade union delegates), Labour Minister Mireille Pénicaud finally unveiled 150 pages of legislation, on 30 August.

Once adopted by the Council of Ministers on 22 September, they will have the power of law without any need for a vote in parliament, because parliament allowed the government to rule in this way in a vote last July.

In terms of labour market deregulations that we have seen across Europe over the last 20 years, there is nothing new here. What's remarkable is the scale of the attack. Were it imposed on workers, it would represent a defeat in France equivalent to the one inflicted by Thatcher in 1984-85.

For now, the government's strength only derives from its absence of opposition. Workers suffered a defeat when all left candidates were eliminated in the first round of the Presidential elections — a situation for which Mélenchon and Hamon must bear responsibility, for having refused to negotiate a single left candidacy. Also relevant is the defeat of the movement of spring 2016 when there were repeated marches of hundreds of thousands, and many

scattered calls for strikes.

The essential features of Macron's plan to undo the Labour Code are:

- make it easier to fire workers by reducing the necessary criteria for an economic justification for mass sackings. The argument will no longer rest on the global health of a multinational, but only on the health of its French branch (NB: before this change, these restrictions had played a role in helping workers' struggles win at Molex and Continental).

- Capping redundancy payments allocated by prud'hommes [industrial tribunals] in the cases of sackings "without real or serious cause". This is an incitement to crimes against workers, to sack workers on any pretext.

- Permitting the use of a CDD [fixed-term contract] over the course of seven consecutive contracts, and the introduction of a "mission" or project-limited CDI [permanent contract], which means the end of real CDI permanent contracts.

- Allowing company-level exceptions to the law and to sectoral agreements on various points: wages, working hours, bonuses, seniority, holidays etc. The government is claiming that it won't touch sectoral agreements, but that's a lie!

The Macron decrees will be giving life to the articles of the El Khomri law imposed by Hollande in 2016. That means a permanent state of social dumping, where every small or medium business would have to race its competitors to the bottom, all of them being at the mercy of their big clients, the major groups which organise large-scale sub-contracting.

- The elimination of trade



Macron is staking his Presidential mandate on new labour laws

unions by various means. Previously, in a company with 11 workers or more, workplace elections [to works committees and other legally-mandated company worker-representation bodies] had to involve candidates presented by unions in the first round. Now it will be possible for bosses of businesses of between 20 and 50 workers to get non-union delegates elected, who would represent no-one but themselves, and would have no protection and therefore would have to go with whatever the boss wanted.

• In workplaces with 20 to 50 workers, the Macron project would aim to fuse different workplace representative bodies into a single conseil économique et social d'entreprise, with a reduction in the amount of money provided for worker representatives. In this way, staff delegates (DPs), who negotiate for workers' immediate demands, works councils which have rights to study the workings of the business, with access to economic

information and bodies of experts [cabinets d'expertise], paid by bosses but mandated by unions, and finally the biggest scandal, the Health, Safety and Conditions Committees (CHSCTs) would all be eliminated.

The CHSCTs play an essential role in protecting workers against accidents and unhealthy or dangerous conditions. From now on, the "delegates" will have much fewer resources, and less time in particular, to defend their colleagues.

• Finally, among the anti-trade union measures offered to bosses, there is the workplace referendum. No need to put up with negotiations with union delegates: bosses can now put an ultimatum on the table: I want this or that, and I'll organise a vote on my demands. We have already seen this move played out at Smart, a car factory, where the boss tried several times to mobilise workers against unions who refused to budge on the management's demand for a longer

working week for no extra pay!

Since July, the role of the traitor in the labour movement is being played, not by the CFDT [union federation] (as has been the case for the last 25 years), but by the FO union federation. FO's federal leadership and its secretary Jean-Claude Mailly has accepted separate negotiations with the Labour Minister and has refused to consider a joint call to the streets with the CGT.

But this will evoke a reaction in the different Departmental-level unions and the different sectoral organisations which have a more combative perspective. The CGT and FO transport unions [subordinate parts of the cross-sector, national union federations] are calling for a strike on 12 September.

For now, the CGT will be in the street on 12 September with the FSU (central teaching union with a large membership of public service workers), Solidaires and UNEF. The next few days will decide whether a majority of the FO structures will come out in favour of action to stop Macron's plans.

The CGT's call, as per the federation's habits, is for "action", with "strikes and demonstrations". It is not posed as a call for strikes per se. Nonetheless, even if it will be difficult to mobilise and regroup people around this call, what is at stake here, aside from defeating the government, is changing the political climate in the country.

**Will it be victory to Macron or an increase in the power of a social movement which consistently opposes Macron's policies? Macron is staking his Presidential mandate on this project.**

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## Contact us

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